

MASS DEPORTATION charter flight January 31st

Posted on *January 29, 2017* by UNITY

A mass deportation charter flight is set to remove up to 100 people from the UK to Nigeria : January 2017.

The charter flight comes at the end of the **weeks of action** against deportations, which saw multi by Movement for Justice and other groups in the UK, a protest in Lagos organised by the Niger and a subvertising campaign on the London underground highlighting the upcoming charter flight

“These charter flights are modern slavery”

Detainees are speaking out against the upcoming charter flight, part of the regular Home Office removing people en masse on privately chartered ghost flights that leave from an undisclosed location in the night. On the basis of previous charter flight reports from Stansted, it is assumed the companies that operate this flight are Titan Airways and Tascor, departing at 22.30hrs.

- Some have been here for over 10 years.
- Some will leave children and partners behind.
- Some have asylum claims and fear for their lives upon removal.
- Some have legal cases pending. The deportation will stop them accessing their rights.
- Many cannot afford to pay the huge legal fees to regularise their stay.

One man who was issued a ticket for the charter flight has an ongoing case, as part of his asylum claim. William (not his real name) has been a resident in the UK for 14 years, and held his ticket for 6 months. His youngest daughter will turn 8 next month and regularly wakes up from nightmares about her Dad. Whilst the Home Office have acknowledged that William has an ongoing case, they have cancelled his ticket and are proceeding with his unlawful deportation. At his recent bail hearing the judge and the Secretary of State refused to give consent, which resulted in William continuing to be detained.

Oyekunle is a gay man from Nigeria – one of the most dangerous countries in the world for LGTBQ people. He came to the UK 4 years ago and claimed asylum. After his initial screening interview he was bailed but never had a full interview because the Home Office sent the notification to the wrong address. As his claim has lapsed; he has been detained again and is scheduled to be part of Tuesday night's flight to Nigeria by charter flight. You can ring Stansted Airport and Titan Airways to tell them that it is not to remove Oyekunle from the UK whilst his asylum claim has not been answered by the Home Office (Oyekunle's Home Office reference number O1810480/002 – Case ID O16688837).

William and Oyekunle tickets for the charter raises questions about collective expulsion, as the Home Office targets specific nationalities in order to fill up seats on the charter flight, regardless of the differences in their individual cases.

“Having to deal with coming off a chartered flight the embarrassment, the sly racial comments when your looking out the bus window, watching your so called escorts laugh and put their

Last week, the British High Commissioner in Nigeria issued a letter in response to the protest in the UK only enforces removal once nationality has been determined, when people are medically fit and have exhausted all legal avenues to remain in the UK. As William's situation evidences, and as in the past, the UK does not meet its own requirements and continues to remove people en masse unlawfully.

What is a charter flight, and who is on one?

"Charter flights" refer to the well-established Home Office practice of hiring a whole (private) plane to remove multiple people against their will at one time – most commonly around 60-80 people (including the pilot). The only people on these flights are deportees* and Tascor security guards, without independent documentation of what takes place on the way to the airport, during the flight, and after landing.

Known Home Office charter flights currently operate to Nigeria, Ghana, Pakistan and Albania, with it likely that charter flights will start up again to Afghanistan. These charter flights have been known to fly to countries within the EU, such as Belgium, to pick up more detainees on the way.

These mass deportations are often used to forcibly remove people to countries which receive 100% of their asylum seekers from the UK – *because they are countries it is considered especially dangerous to fly to* – and therefore where the people may be especially scared to return to, demonstrated by the story of one woman who lost her mental medication she had instantly upon landing in Nigeria.

Bimonthly charter flights to Nigeria and Ghana (named "Operation Majestic" by the Home Office) carry a mixture of people who have had their asylum claims rejected by the Home Office (whilst some have pending claims), people who may have spent their whole life in the UK but lack British citizenship, and, after committing a crime and serving a prison sentence longer than 12 months, are subsequently transferred to a country and given deportation orders to a country they know nothing about and may have never lived in, and are labeled as "overstayers" by the Home Office.

Many on charter flights have been given the "right" to appeal once they have been deported, which is a right given by the Home Office to in part to justify the use of charter flights. From The Unity Centre's experience of cases where individuals given out of country appeal rights, it is clear that these circumstances essentially nullify the right of appeal, given the enormous obstacles that stand in the way. The Unity Centre is currently supporting at least one individual who is pursuing an out of country appeal – who, upon being forcibly removed, was left street homeless and severely ill – meaning that he is unable to even afford enough phone credit to make an appeal in the UK.

Individuals that The Unity Centre have been in contact with over the past years on charter flights include those who have lived in the UK for over 20 years with their partner, children and whole family here, and who have been forcibly removed to a country which was not their country of origin, to people who are tortured in their home countries, to people who lawfully be detained or removed, to people who were put onto charter planes despite how they were physically ill, and to people whose physical health meant that it was highly dangerous for them to fly. One person who was forcibly removed on a charter flight this year came to the UK from Nigeria aged 14, but the Home Office failed to consider his best interests as a child dependent of his mother (who now has British citizenship), and he was forced to leave her, his partner – with whom he was moving in with when he was detained. Charter flights enable individuals with no convincing reasons for staying in the UK to be removed en masse with very few questions asked.

Detainees are calling for raised public awareness of how they are treated and the use of charter flights. Yarl's Wood detention centre said: "It really reminds us of the history you read about slaves. We took people and put them in the ships, to take them and go and sell them. Now, they are doing this on a slave ship. They take you from here and put you on a charter flight."

Why does the Home Office use charter flights?

In an article in The Telegraph (2009), David Wood (then current UK Border Agency Director of Enforcement) explained why the Home Office began using charter flights in 2001: "It was a response to the fact that detainees who are deported realised that if they made a big enough fuss at the airport – if they took off their clothes and started biting and spitting – they could delay the process. We found that pilots would then refuse to fly on the grounds that other passengers would object. So although we still use scheduled flights, we use charter flights for individuals who are *difficult* to remove and might cause trouble."

Whilst Wood's assertion that charter flights are used specifically for *difficult* individuals, it is clear that they are used only for individuals of a *certain nationality* – and that this is what defines the people who are removed. The Home Office does not gather together identified "difficult" detainees, but rather collects people from a range of origins – regardless of how these people are at completely different stages within the asylum process. For example, George was forcibly removed last July, in spite of having more than a week left to a valid EEA application to remain in the UK with his pregnant partner.

Charter flights are incredibly difficult to challenge, specifically due to the simple fact that they are used by the Home Office; for example, in a letter addressed to an individual facing forced removal in 2015, the Home Office states that due to the "effort and expense" of a charter flight, a judicial review (of Home Office decisions) has not been successful for over 36% of people seeking asylum) may not necessarily defer forced removal. The Home Office simultaneously contradicts its own assertion that charter flights are cost-effective (the average cost of a person being removed in 2015 was over £5000). Whilst Detained Fast Track was ruled unlawful, from its inception it is clear that similar barriers to accessing justice through legal representation persist – and that the Home Office deliberately uses its powers to limit those that most need legal protection.

Wood's claim that "difficult" detainees necessitate "special flights" directly implies the misuse of charter flights. In arguing that commercial flights are problematic for forcibly removing people, the Home Office indicates how security guards and immigration officers on board charter flights are able to abide by Home Office policy when enforcing removal, away from public scrutiny (the flights do not follow regular schedules, and detainees do not know the whereabouts of departure). If practices of restraint are so severe that they are enough to kill Jimmy Mubenga on a commercial British Airways flight, what are they like on a private charter flight?

What happens in the lead up to and during a charter flight?

We often do not know what takes place on a charter flight, which is precisely the Home Office's reason for why charter flights continued for a decade before independent inspectors were allowed on board (this happened twice since then: in 2013 and 2015). Upon return, many go into hiding in fear for their safety.

street homeless, or may be taken straight to prison from the airport – and thus it is incredible contact with people who have been deported.

However, we do know that, a few days before the scheduled flight, detainees are moved to detention around London; they are locked up in solitary confinement the night before (and often before the attempt by the Home Office to avoid collective resistance to removal. One detainee who was forced removal on a charter flight to Pakistan said: “Yesterday we moved to short stay side of the flight, they closed our room door at 8pm and then didn’t open...I can’t stay one more night in the cell because the room is so small and we are two boys in there and the air in the room is not enough.”

In the afternoon, detainees are taken (often with force) from detention, handcuffed, and put on the airport. “Reserve” detainees are kept on coaches, unaware if they are being put on the plane if the flight has actually left – demonstrating the Home Office’s clear emphasis on filling the flight regardless of individual cases. Standard practice is that each person facing removal is accompanied by two Tascor guards, so, for a flight forcibly removing 80 people, there would be 160 guards present. Handcuffed detainees board the plane under the threat of violence, often with unnecessary and excessive wrist and waist restraints, often kept on continuously for the whole journey, with head restraints for those who attempt to resist (following the death of Jimmy Mubenga in 2010). One independent report found that the use of handcuffs to circulate around the entire body and hold one’s hands and arms firmly by one side, is not according to the guidelines of exceptional circumstances – but have instead become routine – not only for those who do not too.

Deportees from a charter flight to Nigeria and Ghana back in May 2016 told The Unity Centre that Tascor guards restrained and physically forced one man onto the flight. Another person, deported to Nigeria on a Virgin Atlantic flight earlier this year, told The Unity Centre how he did not physically resist but was made it clear to other passengers and the accompanying guards that he was being forcibly removed. He said that he had a partner and young child in the UK. In response, Tascor guards applied forceful pressure to his wrists, left knee and left thumb. No passenger took action or offered support. For the duration of the flight he was restrained around his waist and wrists. Terry says he left the plane in Nigeria in serious pain: he was limping and he walked with a limp. He says he took more than two weeks to recover and had no money to return to the UK.

Clearly, no one resisting on a charter flights wants to “delay the process” as Wood argues (and a person who is imprisoned in immigration detention); rather, they are extremely fearful of being forcibly returned to their home country, which they previously fled, or have strong reasons to want to remain in the UK.

In the case of Nigeria, once the plane has landed at the naval base in Lagos – after hours and hours of an aggressive Nigerian immigration officials conduct lengthy individual interviews at the front of the plane. Individuals are made to go through the frightening and degrading process of being interviewed by officials demanding bribes in order to let them go. In many cases, police officers (of the country of origin) board the plane upon landing, and using force, eject anyone who is reluctant to leave the cabin and enter a vehicle to be taken to a detention centre, or never step foot in before.

What is the role of the receiving country?

The consent of the country (to which detainees face deportation to) is required in order to issue emergency travel documents, and allow detainees to disembark upon arrival. Movement for attention to the importance of targeting receiving countries' embassies and high commissions, and the Nigerian government to refuse to accept charter flights and allow them to land.

The Nigerian High Commission states that “before any Nigerian is deported, the High Commission must ensure their citizenship has been proved beyond reasonable doubt; they are medically fit; they are allowed to access legal remedies; for those who have stayed in the UK for more than 15 years, proof of existence and capacity to reintegrate.”

This statement can be understood to be completely false, as the Nigerian government is paid to interview people in detention and issue them with emergency travel documents – even when the requirements have not been met. The corruption of the Nigerian Government by the UK was alluded to by David Cameron. The Unity Centre has seen copious numbers of individuals that fail to meet these requirements. Ola (not his real name) was born in Belgium (with a Belgium birth certificate), and had lived in the UK for 17 years before being deported in November to Nigeria – despite having no connections to the country (with no family or records there). The Nigerian High Commission previously refused to issue travel documents for him in 2010. He was later identified as Nigerian by the High Commission based on arbitrary indicators such as the marking on his passport. In such cases, it has even been acknowledged by the Nigerian High Commission that individuals being issued travel documents are not Nigerian, as one detainee said he was greeted by Mrs. Ngere, a Deputy Immigration Officer, as “Eritrean brother”.

The Unity Centre has been in contact with individuals who have been so unsuitable to fly that a detainee was taken to the airport in an ambulance, and subsequently deported on a charter flight. Despite the Home Office, the Nigerian High Commission issue travel documents to individuals (both in and out of detention) regardless of what stage they have reached in their immigration case – demonstrating that they do not examine whether someone has “exhaust[ed] all their legal remedies” or not. Whilst the Nigerian High Commission examine the relations someone may hold to the country they face deportation to, they fail to examine the immediate family members one has in the UK, such as a partner and children. Ray (not his real name) said, “Immigration Judges tell us we can maintain our family life over Skype. But how can you talk through Skype? How can you have a relationship with your wife over Skype?”

-

What you can do!

The Unity Centre calls on all supporters to take immediate action to show opposition to the scheme for Nigeria and Ghana on January 31st 22:30hrs, and voice opposition to the presumed airline, Titan Airways, to take contracts with the Home Office, Titan Airways is complicit in forcibly removing people from the UK against their will, profiting from the violence and assault that takes place on board. It is necessary to understand that there is strong opposition to the racist immigration policies they facilitate through charter flights.

Charter flights are much more difficult than commercial flights for individuals facing deportation to resist, so anything anyone who is not on the flight is able to do can really make a difference.

- Direct action! Anything to delay the coaches and flight, as gaining time for people with removal solicitors may have time to legally act to stop them from being removed. There are instances where people have not been deported, simply because there is not enough time to take everyone on the list from detention and so some are left behind in order to avoid further delay.
- Target receiving countries! Protest and bombard Embassies and High Commissions, and tell them to demand government authorisation and access to land charter flights. Tell the Nigerian High Commission that they do not adhere to their own requirements for issuing travel documents, and that they must be reformed so that the UK government act lawfully in deporting people.
- Campaign against Titan Airways! Titan Airways has won the BACA Best Passenger Charter Airline on several occasions “and today has the prestigious reputation of the *Airline of Choice* for a wide variety of routes worldwide.” Tell Titan Airways to not collude with the Home Office in forcibly removing people who do not want to be deported. Tell Titan Airways not to be complicit in the violence that takes place on these charter flights. As in Germany, encourage the airline to abandon this contract, and discourage other airlines from building relationships with the Home Office.
- Campaign against Tascor! Multiple deportees have told The Unity Centre that, after applying for travel restraints to them during the removal flight, guards often begin “casually chatting”, telling people that their jobs are “simply to effect deportation” and that they are “just doing their jobs”. These instances are a clear denial of complicity by those who collaborate with the Home Office’s and carry out the deportation regime.
- Publicise that this charter flight is taking place! In line with the Home Office’s aims, most people on regular ghost flights leave the UK, sending people to countries they are scared to return to, or not to, and violently taking them away from family and lives in the UK.

To get in touch about the upcoming charter flight, contact The Unity Centre via unitycentremec

If you are in detention and want to speak out, contact Detained Voices via detainedvoices@rise

To get in touch about the 2 weeks of action, contact Watch Deportations via watchdeportation.org

For updates

Facebook

Twitter

This entry was posted in *Appeals, Events, News, Uncategorized*. Bookmark the *permalink*.

← URGENT ACTION APPEAL: LET IDRESS STAY

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Sign up to Glasgow mailing list, by email
unitycentrenewsglasgow-
subscribe@lists.riseup.net

Sign up to UK mailing list, by email
unitycentrenewsuk-subscribe@lists.riseup.net



The Unity Centre 22 Ibrox Street Glasgow G51
1AD



info@unitycentreglasgow.org

f **🐦** **in** **Bē** **⊕**

Zerif Lite powered by WordPress